

Robert Cahill

CARES Commission Hearing

October 21, 2003

- The Veterans Advisory Committee of VA Hudson Valley put together a plan that was submitted to the VISN and VA Central Office. "This plan is a veterans plan unfettered by the administration.
- The future generations of veterans must benefit from the plan that is being set forth.
- Where is the financial backing for this national plan going to come from? Who will determine which parts of the plan will be accepted / rejected?
- If there are going to be any services transferred or hospitals closed, there MUST be a good transportation system in place before services are transferred / or hospitals closed.
- Communications have taken place in the Hudson Valley throughout the CARES process at all levels of the veterans' organizations, local officials and to Congressional staff.

Robert Cahill

CARES Commission Hearing (continued)

October 21, 2003

- Nursing Home care costs are extremely expensive. The CARES plan should include expanded nursing home beds funded directly by the VA. Beds should not be contracted where veterans must then pay full cost of care.
- If the plan is accepted, then Montrose campus should remain for future use by veterans in an enhanced use type project.
- In closing, the plan, I believe must include improved quality of health care for future generations of veterans.

Good afternoon. My name is Charles Ferrante and I am a member of the Marine Corps League, Putnam County Detachment #242.

To get to the point, I am not in favor of downsizing the VA hospital at Montrose.

I have been working closely with the veterans in this area since 1962, when I entered the U.S. Marine Corps.

Over the past few years, I have visited countless veterans on the Montrose campus, keeping them company and talking to them soldier to soldier.

These walls are much more to them than just bricks and mortar.

They represent a commitment by their country to see that they are taken care of; that their efforts and sacrifices on the battlefield are not forgotten.

When I look at some of these battle-tested men and see the looks of confusion and desperation on their faces because they think their government, for whom they gave a significant portion of their life, is going to take away the one sanctuary that they know it breaks my heart.

That's why I am here today.

I'm here to stand on the front line to defend those who have defended all of us but can no longer defend themselves from a heartless bureaucratic machine only concerned with the bottom line.

The bottom line, however, doesn't take into consideration the human beings that are in this hospital and need all of the services it provides.

To say that the Montrose campus is of vital importance to the veterans of the Hudson Valley would be an understatement.

The patients in the psych unit, for whom comfort and familiarity are so vital, know no other home.

To bed-ridden veterans, it is a place close to home that their family and friends can come to visit.

Having these services so close to them offers a feeling of security and comfort, knowing that if they need to stay overnight that a loved one can be there in the morning to wish you well.

As a combat veteran, I can attest to the importance of troop morale.

Right now, as we're sending young men and women overseas, we don't want to send mixed messages.

These young men and women are going to war to fulfill their obligations to their country.

But they expect when they return from fighting that their country will fulfill their end of the bargain.

When we're closing their hometown hospitals, GIs on the ground wonder what they are going to be coming home to when they are finished serving.

They want to know that they are going to come home to a country that cares and appreciates the sacrifices they are making.

Closing this hospital will undermine that understanding.

It will say to them that we don't care; that the injuries they sustain are of no significance.

Mr. Chairman, that message is unacceptable.

Our federal government has to get its priorities straight.

If it can somehow find the money to help fund the National Peanut Festival in Alabama and the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame in Texas, then I'm sure that it can find some money for veterans and keep all of the services provided by the FDR Veterans Hospital available.

As you can see by the federal representatives present today, the issue transcends party lines here in the region.

Democrats and Republicans both know how valuable this hospital is to veterans in the Hudson Valley.

I hope, Mr. Chairman, as you and the other members of the CARES Commission review the recommendations of the Draft National Plan, that you will see that this proposal, to cease inpatient services at Montrose, is a bad idea.

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**

**Of**

**Vietnam Veterans of America  
New York State Council**

**Submitted by**

**Daniel Griffin  
Executive Director  
VVA New York Chapter 49**

**Before the**

**CARES Commission**

**Regarding**

**Draft National CARES Plans**

**Presented At**

**FDR Veterans Hospital  
VISN 3  
Montrose, NY**

**October 21, 2003**

Good afternoon my name is Daniel Griffin; I am Executive Director of Chapter 49 for Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) New York State Council. Thank you Chairman Alvarez and your colleagues for the opportunity to testify today at the VA Medical Center, regarding the Draft National CARES Plan for the delivery of health care to veterans who utilize VISN 3 in Montrose, New York , for care and treatment.

The original concept for assessing the real-estate holdings and plans for the disposition of “excess” properties of the Department of Veterans Affairs makes sense. No one wants to see money being wasted, especially money that could be better spent on rendering real health care to veterans. There is no question that the VA has many buildings at various facilities that are expendable.

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), New York State Council believes that this process has strayed from its original intent. We have grave misgivings about the proposed market plan before you. We understand the need to cut costs, but the FDR hospital is unique in that it is primarily a mental health facility. It is situated on 180 acres of prime Hudson Valley property with spectacular river views. This land could be sold for development and the money could be used to fund a new more efficient hospital. However, as we see it, developers would not be able to sell new homes on the property because there would be a VA Hospital that specializes in mental health sharing the site. Therefore the C.A.R.E.S. plan calls for all inpatients to be moved to Castle Point VA Hospital, which is situated in a rural area. We believe that this part of the plan is not serving the best interests of veterans. In addition the, FDR Hospital is situated just twenty miles from New York City. This means that our hospital could be used to care for a large number of casualties in the event of a natural disaster or a terrorist attack. We need to maintain enough beds for this purpose. On September 11, 2001, FDR Hospital sent a team of doctors to

New York City to treat the victims for PTSD. We pray they will never be asked to do this again, but they are a valuable resource that should not be forgotten. We must keep the PTSD unit and all inpatient wards at our Hospital.

Mr. Chairman, the proposed National Draft CARES Plan entitled VISN 3 Special Disability Program Planning Initiatives DID NOT include PTSD, Substance Abuse and Traumatic Brain Injuries. VVA's founding principle is "Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another". We do not want this commission to abandon these programs which are vital to the care and treatment of our active military and to those who served this country in past wars.

In conclusion, we feel that decisions made within the context of the proposed Draft National CARES Plan will effectively close beds, cut staffing; compromise services, and damages the VA's ability to respond to the emerging needs of veterans. We believe that this effort, no matter how well intended, will in many instances prove to be counterproductive and ultimately extremely expensive to rectify.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to submit our statement for the record before this commission on behalf of Chapter 49 for Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) New York State Council.

I will be more than happy to answer any questions you have.

**CARES COMMISSION TESTIMONY**  
**VAMC – MONTROSE, NY**

**OCTOBER 21, 2003**

**James P. McCauley, Jr.**  
**24 Highland Ave.**  
**Chappaqua, NY 10514**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**TIME: 60sec**

NAME, ADDRESS, AFFILIATIONS, MILITARY SERVICE, (HIGHLIGHTS),

**VAMC EXPERIENCES:**

**TIME: 30sec**

USE OF MEDICAL SERVICES MONTROSE, CASTLE POINT, BRONX(LIMITED)

**PURPOSE:**

**TIME: 30sec**

TO REQUEST THAT THE CARES COMMISSION AND SECRETARY PRINCIPAL DELAY IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED ACTIONS UNTIL ADEQUATE STUDY CAN BE COMPLETED TO MEASURE THE IMPACT OF PROPOSED REDUCTIONS OF SERVICE AND DIVESTMENT OF MONTROSE PROPERTY ON NOT ONLY THE VETERANS COMMUNITY SERVED BUT THE SURROUNDING AREA.

**RATIONALE FOR REQUEST:**

**TIME: 90sec.**

VA's SECONDARY MISSION IS TO SUPPORT DoD IN TIME OF EMERGENCY.

NO ADEQUATE CONSIDERATION HAD BEEN GIVEN TO THE USE OF THIS FACILITY AS A SHELTER OR PRIMARY CARE TREATMENT CENTER IN TIME OF EMERGENCIES GENERATED BY NATURAL CAUSES OR TERRORIST ACTIONS.

MEETINGS ARE SCHEDULED BETWEEN WESTCHESTER CO. DES(Dept. of Emergency Services) AND MONTROSE VA FD TO DISCUSS COOPERATION, MUTUAL AID, USE OF VA HAZMAT RESOURCES.



THESE CONSULTATIONS SHOULD BE FULLY DEVELOPED AND ADEQUATE STUDY BE DONE BY VA, NYS SEMO, FEMA, AND WESTCHESTER CO. BEFORE ANY FINAL DECISIONS ARE TAKEN

IT WOULD BE A GREAT WASTE OF OUR SOCIETAL RESOURCES TO RENDER THIS FACILITY UNUSEABLE OR UNAVAILABLE TO THE SOCIETY AT LARGE .

GIVEN WHAT WE FACE TODAY THE CLOSING OF THIS TYPE OF FACILITY IN A MAJOR METRO AREA MAY BE FAR MORE COSTLY THAN CAN BE MEASURED.

CLOSING:

TIME: 30sec.

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY.

James P. McCauley, Jr.  
24 Highland Avenue  
Chappaqua, New York, 10514  
SS: 075-36-0057

Life long Resident of Westchester 56 yrs old -2 children 23 & 18  
25 years in Chappaqua 1 grandchild

Member of Chapter 49 VVA -Past President & Board Member  
Member Vietnam Veterans Advisory Board - Montrose VA  
Long Term involvement in Veterans Housing Issues in community  
Uses Montrose VA for Medical Services

Chairman CERT -Town Of New Castle - Present  
Marshall New Castle Memorial Day Committee 1996- Present

Military Service: Captain - US Army 1966 -1971  
Intelligence Officers School Special Forces Training  
Vietnamese Language School, Airborne Training

Vietnam Service: 1969 - SOG-CCC 5th Special Forces Gp, Kontum, RVN  
1970-1971 MACVSOG LAOS Desk Officer

"Cross Border" Intel gathering missions.

Awarded 2 Bronze Stars, 3 Army Commendation Medals, w/Valor

Combat Infantryman's Badge, Parachute Badge

Security Clearance: Top Secret Cypto-Special Intelligence

Pace University - BA Undergraduate 1973  
MBA Finance 1983

Participated in

Joint service Medal,

Edie Meeks  
10 Washington Ave  
Beacon, NY 12508  
845-831-9610

My name is Edie Meeks. I served in the US Army Nurse Corps 1968-1970 with a one year tour in Vietnam. Presently I serve on the Board of Directors of the Vietnam Women's Memorial and am a member of the Hudson Valley Veteran's Advisory Council.

I am here today to ask you to keep the Veterans uppermost in your minds and hearts when making decisions about the VA system and health care in the Hudson Valley. These are women and men who gave, either by volunteering or being drafted, time out of their lives so the rest of the United States could live in comfort and freedom. They did not shirk their duty but stood up and said "Yes" when asked .

My concern is two-fold. First, the closing of facilities. I understand there is a need to downsize. Many of the buildings on both campuses are not being used. My concern is -with the downsizing will the money leave the area? If the money were to stay here to increase clinics, hire more and better qualified doctors, perhaps build a smaller well equipt hospital at Castle point- I wouldn't mind the closing. If the monies gained from leasing the land and buildings to Montrose Elders for a life care community that is Veteran friendly were to stay here in the Hudson Valley to benefit the increasing number of local veterans, again, I wouldn't mind. But, to close parts or all of a campus and remove the monies is unfair. As we get older the veterans needing the VA increases. With children grown and retirement either present or in the near future I have see PTSD becoming more prevelent.

Which brings me to my second concern--Women Veterans. O For many years the women who served, at least the ones I know, stayed away from the VA in droves. There are several reasons, the first being, the VA was not set up to deal with women. They tended to throw them into the same category as men, 'a soldier is a soldier'. This may come as a surprise but men and women are different. Body, mind, and heart they are different. They perceive and deal with situations differently. Physically, their bodies may react to the chemicals, toxins, and diseases they are exposed to in a different manner. The majority of the 'wounds' suffered by the Vietnam Era women were of the heart. Many of us suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and later from cancers of all kinds. But to get care we had to prove, push, and beg and then they had no facilities for women.

The Armed Forces have so many more women in service now. The VA should be gearing up to take care of not only the male vets who are coming back from all the wars we are participating in but they should have the necessary facilities for the women. They should feel welcomed, cared about, and the necessary clinics and qualified doctors should be available .Yearly PAP smears and breast exams should be available to all women no matter what their income. The Armed Services

2

and the VA have no idea what effect Agent Orange had on the bodies of the women who served in Vietnam because they did not keep track of the women. The women veterans should be valued, honored, and cared for.

The Hudson Valley VA is making efforts to reach out to the female vets. If the monies 'saved' by downsizing were to stay in this area more and better facilities would be here waiting to care for the women who volunteered their time and lives for their country.

Men and women who serve all enter the service with a basic trust—that the country they serve will value their gift of time, their gift of their skills, and sometimes their gift of their lives or shattered bodies and minds. During and after the Vietnam War that trust was betrayed as vets were treated poorly or not at all. It is up to all of us to see that this never happens again. Veterans should be treasured and what better way of honoring these men and women than taking the best care of their bodies minds and hearts close to their homes. This form of thankyou is the least we can do.

Thankyou for your attention.

Edie Meeks  
Board of Directors  
Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation  
Hudson Valley Advisory Council, Member